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Washington Report
by Henry A. Waxman
Congressman, 24th District

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COMMON SENSE ABOUT TEENAGE SEX

I find myself in the middle of a bitter controversy over teenage sex. I am the author of the Family Planning Act of 1981. As a Congressman and a father of a teenage daughter, I believe this bill is responsible, highly moral, and very much needed.

The Waxman Family Planning Bill allows us to continue and strengthen programs to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies. We provide the funds to public and non-profit private agencies such as Planned Parenthood. They, in turn, offer teenagers and young adults a wide range of counseling and information on birth control, VD, and the responsibilities of parenthood.

Family planning saves taxpayers more than three times as much as it costs. It reduces the number of welfare cases which so often arise as a result of an unwanted, unplanned pregnancy -- especially if the mother is young and unmarried.

The self-styled "moral majority" has declared war on family planning. Right-wing Republican Senators Jeremiah Denton and Orrin Hatch have introduced an "alternative" to family planning. Their bill promotes "chastity and self discipline". Instead of telling sexually active teenagers about the pill, IUDs, prophylactics and other means of preventing pregnancy, Denton and Hatch want us to preach to them about the immorality of their conduct.

The "moralists" sidesteps the realities of teenage sexuality in America today. The majority of teenagers believe sex outside marriage is morally acceptable. Many youths begin their sex lives at a young age, and remain sexually active. These patterns will not

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be altered by self-righteous pronouncements from people with different moral beliefs.

My bill is based on the assumption that a 15-year-old sexually active girl or boy ought to know how to avoid pregnancy. My bill is based on the premise that many youngsters who desperately need sex counseling will never seek it if they must first obtain the written permission of their parents.

What little family planning counseling the Denton-Hatch bill offers requires "parental consent". I find this absurd. It is precisely those teenagers who fear their parents and cannot communicate with them that need confidential counseling the most.

Responsible family planning is not in an experimental stage. It is a proven approach from which both the clients and the larger society benefit immeasurably. We must not let the Moral Neanderthals destroy it.

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